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## HOW CAN WE ATTRACT SUITABLE APPLICANTS TO OUR TRAINING SCHOOLS?<sup>1</sup>

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Difficulty in attracting suitable applicants is not peculiar to training schools for nurses. A good many other professional schools, most of them in fact, find similar difficulty. Medical schools are constantly complaining of the poor caliber of their students, and we are not without some evidence that their complaint is justified. Mr. Pritchett, of the Carnegie Foundation, says that "for twenty-five years past there has been an enormous overproduction of uneducated and ill-trained medical practitioners," and later, "the profession has been diluted by the presence of a great number of men with low ideals both of education and professional honor," and Mr. Flexner, continuing, speaks of a "century of reckless overproduction of cheap doctors."

Law schools admit large numbers of men, who give little impression after graduating that they are in any way concerned with the maintenance of justice. In fact the sharp unscrupulous attorney who is unpleasantly common in our communities, may become a serious obstacle to the enforcement of the law.

As for the theological schools, it has long been a serious problem with them to attract enough men of suitable education and general fitness to fill the ministry. The inefficiency of the ministry is even given as one of the reasons for an alleged decay of churches. President Faunce, of Brown University, says, "Few young men of strong personality and power of leadership are now choosing the ministry."

The army and navy, once the most popular and attractive of professions, are now in pretty much the same plight.

It is suggested that the profession of teaching may be an exception, that it is rather over than under-supplied with pretty good candidates, that too many (women especially) are turning in this direction. Yet no one who is at all familiar with this great profession with its enormous army of workers (over 17,000 in New York City alone) could deny that it has many members who are conspicuously unqualified for the work they are doing.

<sup>1</sup> Read at a meeting of the New York City League of Nursing Education, January, 1914.

It would be, I think, quite correct to conclude that scarcity of good candidates for admission to training schools is not singular, and is not particularly characteristic of training schools, since all of the professional schools are obviously unable to attract and send forth enough competent men and women to do the work they have undertaken. And I think it would also be correct to say that in practically all of these professions the effort to improve the quality and character of aspirants for admission has taken one large general form and direction. It has been to lift the requirements for admission higher, to improve the quality of the education and training offered, and through these means and others, to improve the status of the profession itself; to make it more efficient, more respected and honored in society. I do not think of any exception to this general rule. The inference or assumption then is inevitable, that the trouble with many of our professions is, or has been, low standards; that this fact has influenced the whole situation, the usefulness and efficiency of the members of the profession, the estimation in which it is held by the public, the standing of its schools, its ability to attract in any suitable number men or women of high personal and educational qualifications.

A careful study of the causes of the scarcity of good candidates for admission to our training schools for nurses, would probably show that nursing in nowise differs essentially from these other professions in its fundamental problems of growth and development; that the difficulties it encounters are similar, and the obstacles to progress practically identical. It appears logical, therefore, that methods of meeting and overcoming them should move along the lines in which they are moving. But nursing has not only to meet the usual difficulties common to all professions; it has, in addition, peculiar problems of its own. It must make its painful progress upward through paths bristling with impediments of a special and unusual nature. Some such peculiar conditions stand out conspicuously, others are subtle and obscure, but are not without considerable importance. Surveyed briefly they are, the enormous and rapid developments in medicine and surgery, and, consequently, of hospitals calling within a brief period for an extraordinary accession to the number of nurses needed; the expansion simultaneously in the most striking manner of the whole field of women's activities; the entire inability of our training schools to bring their methods of training out of that narrowness and rigidity of earlier days into line with modern standards of professional education; and again, the rise and great vogue of commercial hospitals, and of what might perhaps be called the business of medicine. Add to these the still existing prevalence of a

sentiment which looks upon nursing as an easily-acquired homely art, in preparation for which nature leads the way, and it really matters very little, after all, what follows. In other words the public is still really willing to accept ignorance and incompetence in the care of its sick, as in meeting no other one of its vital needs. All of these conditions and influences have acted in combination, or singly, and in various ways, sometimes to exploit, as it were, the nurse, and sometimes the education of the nurse, and to retard or crush out efforts toward genuine and proper development.

The growth in hospitals and in training schools has for years been phenomenal, and it is continuing. New hospitals are constantly arising in large and small cities, and more recently in the small towns. Some of them are needed, some of them are not. Special and private hospitals in particular have been multiplying, and it is said that there are now over forty different varieties of institutions for the treatment of the sick in New York State alone. Noteworthy, also, is the continued expansion in our great general city hospitals. There seems to be a feeling that something is wrong during the year in which no record can be made of establishing or opening a new ward or department. The very great dependence of hospitals upon training schools, which are to them the equivalent in the most literal sense of a nursing staff, providing both officers and body of workers, has created a peculiar demand for students, which is quite independent of the demand and need for nurses for the public outside of hospitals. Part of a genuine professional field in other words, was, and is, in the hospitals, being supplied with students. This demand in hospitals for workers has been so urgent, so large, and of such continuous growth, that, if it were to be met entirely by students, it could only be done by keeping requirements for admission at a very low standard. This is, in effect, what has happened, and it is, in a measure, reacting now disastrously upon training schools—and upon hospitals, also—and further upon the proper status of nursing in the community.

When nursing was first established, there were really but two professions for women, teaching and nursing, but of recent years, new and interesting occupations for women have been steadily opening, and attention has been deflected from these older time-honored occupations into other and newer channels. Women are now working in many capacities in public and in private life, to an extent undreamed-of twenty-five years ago, and paths for advancement long closed are now opening for them. Who, for instance, would have dreamed, even a decade ago, of a woman as Commissioner of Correction (as Miss Davis now is) in this great city of New York, or as head of a Federal Bureau as Miss Lathrop

is, in Washington? These are great examples, but their present opportunity for usefulness was not reached without a long apprenticeship in other forms of social or institutional work.

Of the more common occupations, secretarial work is occupying many well-educated and able women. Our social, civic and educational institutions everywhere are employing in some secretarial capacity a very large and steadily-increasing number of educated women. The requirements for such work as they are doing are fairly high, and the field is a popular one among college women.

The field for librarians has widened greatly, and is affording ever-increasing scope for highly-educated women. In certain special branches where expert work is needed, exceptional qualifications are maintained. More attractive still, apparently, at the moment, are those activities which are rather loosely summed up in the term social work, and those who are engaged in it are just those women who, a decade or two ago, would have been drawn to training schools. The work has steadily grown in interest, usefulness and dignity, and schools of philanthropy are beginning to require full college work of their candidates for admission. I think I am right in saying that in the School of Philanthropy in New York a very large proportion of the students are college graduates. Few nurses qualify for admission to its regular courses, and special courses of an elementary and popular type have been arranged for them. It appears to be true that in several occupations which are not to be compared with nursing in importance and in difficulty, the requirements for admission are considerably higher. As a matter of actual fact, I cannot, at the moment, think of any of the more serious callings in life, which it is so easy to enter, as nursing is today. So it cannot be that these many new occupations are easier of access than nursing is; on the contrary, they are all harder to enter.

Possibly, then, the remuneration in these other fields is higher than in nursing and is thus a factor in attracting candidates. Even the most casual study shows that this ground cannot be well taken. In the majority of those positions which are held by nurses in institutions, the salaries are high in comparison with those of secretaries, social workers or teachers. I grant that the salaries of teachers are not what they should be, but this does not affect the fact that the salaries of nurses generally are considerably higher, and this will hold true of even the least-adequately paid branch of nurses' work, that in the city health departments. The nurse in such a department enters upon her work at a salary appreciably higher than that of the young teacher, the difference being (and this is a vital matter, needing to be attended to) that the teacher has some advancement and promotion to look forward to, while the nurse

has practically none. The writer knows a nurse who has done excellent work in the New York City Health Department for about ten years. Her salary began at \$900, and is still at that sum. There is little, if any, outlook for advancement, and she may have to give up a work which she likes, and in which she has proved valuable, in order to secure the larger income which she earns, and for which she is undoubtedly qualified. She is one of a staff of nearly six hundred nurses, whose outlook for advancement under the present system appears to be no greater than hers.

From the foregoing it would appear that there may be something in the conditions of nursing generally and of work in hospitals and training schools, which is keeping out candidates. What is this something? I am not sure that I know, but in so far as training schools are concerned, I can make a pretty shrewd guess, and can give you some, at least, of the reasons as other people give them to me. Without any attempt at logical order, they stand about as follows:

First, there is a decided and almost universal objection to the long hours of hard ward work, which are still the rule for student nurses in our hospitals. Out of several thousand hospitals, only about eighty have yet established an eight-hour day. (This record was made before the passage of the law in California requiring the eight-hour day for pupil nurses in all hospitals in that state.) There is a particularly deep-rooted objection to the twelve hours of night work for such students, night work usually occupying from six to eight months out of the entire three years of training. There is further objection to the hours for special nurses, which are almost never less than twelve, and may be from sixteen to eighteen. Many hospitals of good standing otherwise, are flagrant offenders in this respect.

The next objection is to the amount of ordinary routine housework frequently included in the training throughout the entire course. It is contended that this has limited educational or disciplinary value; that its chief purpose is to save the expense of domestic labor, and that it should be turned over to the department of domestic service to which it belongs.

The third objection is to the elementary and superficial character of the instruction, to the limited amount offered, and to the pitifully inadequate preparation of many of those who teach. It is further urged that even if the teaching were of the highest degree of excellence, it is impossible for students to profit by it, after so many hours of hard physical work, such as is involved in actual care of the sick—work which is exacting also from the standpoint of mental strain and responsibility.

Other objections constantly made are to the childish and unintelligent

nature of much of the discipline, to the restrictions thrown about the whole life of the student, preventing natural pleasures and diversions, such as every healthy human being should have, which should be liberal, rather than restricted, for those whose main work is of so serious and often depressing a nature. Lack of reasonable vacations and holidays, lack frequently of suitable living conditions, lack of libraries, of current reading material, of suitable teaching material, are also frequently the ground for objections, and summed up they present a formidable array. Foremost, however, among them, and ever-present, stands the genuine fear of a breakdown in health for the student. Not all of these conditions to which objections have been made are usually found in any one hospital or training school, but some of them would probably be discovered in all schools, and I presume that careful study would reveal other less conspicuous and more subtle defects, to which we have grown accustomed.

There is one aspect of the situation which it might be well perhaps to clear up before going further. It has been said, and letters have stated in the public press, that the scarcity of applicants to training schools is due to the establishment of laws requiring unattainable educational standards for admission. The answer to that is that the scarcity of applicants has nothing whatever to do with laws for the registration of nurses. Every training school superintendent knows that there has never been a time when suitable applicants were sufficiently numerous. Many years ago, before so many avenues of work for women were opened, there was probably a larger number of persons applying for admission, but we all know that the majority of them were hopelessly ineligible. Applicants began to decrease in actual number about fifteen years ago—some years before any law was passed. Several years before the first law was passed certain training schools of our acquaintance were writing, in despair of securing enough students for their work, asking us to refer to them those candidates whom we had been unable to accept. Our answer to that usually was that while large numbers did apply, many were wholly unfitted and that in the last analysis we never sent away any applicant who, we thought, could by any human effort within our grasp, be made into a good nurse.

When we hear of a time when there were hundreds of applicants, we know quite well that all but the merest handful of them would have been unable to present even the minimum in qualifications of education and personal fitness for the work of nursing. Scarcity of good applicants existed before laws were even thought of; it is found in states where they have no laws, and it is even a greater problem in some of these states than in those in which laws are in operation. It is quite a problem, too, in Canada from which we formerly received a good number of very good

candidates. They are saying now over there that they cannot recruit their own schools, though no laws are hindering them.

In England, where there are no laws, there is increasing anxiety over the dearth of good applicants. The quality of those applying in some quarters may perhaps be gathered from some such statement as this. "The women we are now actually taking in would hardly make good housemaids. We cannot get anyone else to *do the work*." That last sentence provides the keynote of such suggestions as I have for trying to increase the number of suitable candidates for admission to our training schools.

First, it seems to me we must gradually stop thinking of student nurses purely or even largely, as providing an easy and convenient means of getting a great mass of hospital work done, some of which is nursing and some of which is not; some of which provides valuable training for nurses, and some of which provides no training at all for intelligent women. We must reorganize our minds on this subject, and when that is once done it will not be too difficult a task to reorganize our work. We must first, last and all the time look upon the pupil nurse as a pupil in the fullest sense of the word and provide for her as such, in instruction, in practical training and in methods of life and discipline.

A really thoughtful, seriously-made study of our method of practical training would probably lead us to eliminate a good deal of the most simple, unskilled domestic labor now performed by students of all grades as a routine part of their daily work, and place it where it belongs, in the hands of domestic employees as a branch of elementary household labor. To illustrate my point, it is important, for instance, that bath tubs should be carefully cleaned as often as needed, that basins and all other necessary lavatory utensils should be kept absolutely clean, but it is no more necessary that a nurse should do this daily than that she should clean floors and windows. It is important, for instance, that linen should be neatly folded and kept in orderly arrangement for convenient use, and that linen room shelves and drawers should be clean. It is not necessary that such work should devolve upon the student nurse. Her time could be spent more profitably in actually nursing her patients, studying their condition, ministering to their immediate needs. Of course, the nurse should be taught how to clean and care for properly, every part of her patient's surroundings and every appliance used, but it is not necessary, if a woman is intelligent enough to be a nurse at all, to make such work a routine process in her training for the entire three years, or even for an appreciable part of that period.

To reconstruct what is called "ward work" and sift out of it a good deal that need not be done systematically by pupil nurses, would greatly



improve their training, and tend to remove the reasonable objections that intelligent use is not made of the student's time, strength and mental powers. We have been making, of course, transfers of work of this kind constantly for a good many years, and producing thereby better and better nurses, but we have not gone far enough, not nearly.

Then there must be better teaching in our training schools, and by this I do not mean, wholly, teaching in class or lecture room, important and essential as that is, but the inclusion also, of a kind of clinical teaching in the wards over the patients which as yet has been nowhere worked out in the degree in which it should be worked out. This is teaching, not only of highly technical and complicated procedures, but of the very heart and essence of nursing. It must be done by the expert nurse, who works carefully, critically, yet sympathetically, exacting the best efforts of her students, yet inspiring them to further effort in the spirit and in the way in which the painter or the musician passes over his art to his pupils. "For nursing," as Florence Nightingale says, "is the finest art of them all." To teach in this way we must have highly skilled graduate nurses at the heads of our wards, capable of first seeing their work from this standpoint, and then of imparting their art to pupil nurses, helping them to become skillful, arousing their thoughtful interest in the progress of their patients, inspiring them with enthusiasm, and creating in them love and respect for their work. Such teaching cannot usually be done by a young pupil nurse, and to place a pupil nurse in charge of a ward with its unparalleled opportunity for such instruction, because that happens to be a convenient way of meeting the situation, and lessening the expense, is a grievous error. We shall not attract women into our schools by placing them in the hands of their own schoolmates to be trained and developed. That system went out of use in other branches of education long ago, and we retain it in training schools, if we do, at far too heavy a cost.

All teaching in training schools should be done by nurses or other instructors expert in the subject they teach, whether it is theoretical, practical or personal. They should be adequately paid for such service and given proper status and place and equipment with which to carry on work recognized as essential, indispensable and important. A liberal policy in this matter of instruction, together with the provision of a sound and well-balanced system of teaching, will do much to attract a larger number of good candidates to our training schools. That system is not liberal and well-balanced which provides weekly but two or three hours of instruction, while exacting from fifty-six to seventy hours of practical work.

Important and necessary as the practical work is, it will render almost useless any system of teaching, no matter how excellent, unless kept within rational limits for students, with the constant recognition of the fact, that they enter as students with rights to be considered, and not merely as a body of workers whose services may be commanded.

It has proved and is still proving practically impossible for students to benefit as they should by instruction, no matter how valuable or how interesting, when they have not suitable time for study, and when they are too tired after several hours of physical work to follow the teacher with a clear comprehension of what is being taught. A quarter of a century of experience and study of this question leads me to an unshakable conviction that reform in hours of work for students in hospitals is our first and fundamental problem, that it is urgently and widely needed and that without this, other improvements and advances are of limited utility, and some of them indeed cannot be safely urged. Eight hours of hospital work daily for students is the very maximum which can be carried on concurrently with an adequate system of instruction. This, of course, does not apply at all to the preliminary term when the student is being prepared for the hospital by concentrating a good deal of necessary instruction into a brief period. This time should always be truly independent of hospital requirements.

There is one aspect of our work seldom touched upon, yet profoundly important. I would plead for a closer relationship between the superintendent of nurses, her staff of assistants and the pupils of the school. A stronger sympathy and a deeper understanding on both sides must somehow be created. Students must obtain a clearer comprehension of the purposes and value of discipline and must carry it willingly and intelligently into efforts to strengthen themselves and to overcome weaknesses. In some way it ought to be possible to give students a correct estimate of the peculiarly heavy burden of work, anxiety and responsibility which must inevitably be borne by the heads of all hospital training schools. There must be mutual confidence and respect, and our students everywhere must feel that their happiest as well as their most useful days have been spent in hospital and training school, to which they turn ever with greatest loyalty and affection. They should have no greater pride or pleasure than to bring into the work they love and the schools they believe in, sisters, relations and friends. Until our outgoing students carry this spirit with them, we can hardly assume that our work is truly successful.

It is in these directions mainly, I believe, that we should work in enabling our training schools to attract and hold the better type of women who should be found in them in ever increasing numbers. And it is

the greatest encouragement to see that those schools which do maintain good educational standards and are constantly striving to improve their methods (and the number of these is growing) are able to attract exceptionally well-qualified candidates. Encouraging too, is it to know that every step forward in the improvement of the training school and the character of the candidates for admission, is also a step forward for the hospital with which it is connected, strengthening and advancing its work also.

Schools are, of course, justified in using every legitimate means of informing the public accurately about their work. The ordinary methods of publicity are available for them as freely as for other schools and colleges, though hitherto, so far as nursing is concerned, they have been usually used most largely by those having the least to offer. Good service might be rendered by the publication of carefully-written articles in some of our best periodicals describing a few of our great historical training schools, discussing the life of the student in hospital and school, and presenting the most recent and interesting developments in the professional field of nursing. The work which nurses are doing for the public health, showing its significance, and the promise it holds for the future, would be likely to lead many thoughtful women to a new interest in training schools and what they offer. But, of course, the very best effort to attract will be made unconsciously through the students and graduates of our schools. There never was a time in history when so many bright, eager-hearted young women were seeking occupations in which they may be able to render some useful service to their fellows, and instead of being overlooked, our training schools ought to be among the most desirable institutions of the world for further educating and training women of such character and such aspirations.

## THE SOCIAL VALUE OF NURSE TRAINING

By ETHEL E. GOSS

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In the rearrangement of social forces that is taking place today, every phase of social life is being scrutinized and re-valued. "We live," says Walter Lippman in his *Preface to Politics*, "in a revolutionary period and nothing is so important as to be aware of it." The measure of our self-consciousness will more or less determine whether we are to be the victims or masters of change. Nowadays, life has very complicated interests, and seeing, reading, listening, thinking, means largely the study of public problems, pressing for attention. The issues are so many, and